

Message Text

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SUBJECT: NOVEMBER 14 AUSTRIAN LANGUAGE CENSUS

REF: VIENNA 9391

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL SOURCES, PARTICIPATION IN NOVEMBER 14 LANGUAGE CENSUS VARIED FROM LOW OF 5 PERCENT IN VORALBERG TO ESTIMATED 86 PERCENT IN CARINTHIA WHICH BESET BY SLOVENIAN MINORITY CONTROVERSY. POOR TURNOUT OUTSIDE CARINTHIA ATTRIBUTED TO WIDESPREAD POPULAR INDIFFERENCE TO ISSUE AND TO RAINY WEATHER ON NOVEMBER 14. FINAL RESULTS, TO BECOME AVAILABLE ONLY IN EARLY 1977, ARE LIKELY TO BE OF AT MOST VERY LIMITED VALUE IN DETERMINING WHERE TO ERECT BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN SOUTHERN CARINTHIA. EXPECTATION NOW IS THAT SLOVENIAN MINORITY LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES WILL ATTEMPT IN 1977 TO RESOLVE ISSUE BY

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NEW YET TO BE DEVELOPED APPROACH. END SUMMARY.

2. AS ANTICIPATED (REFTEL), PARTICIPATION IN NATION-WIDE LANGUAGE CENSUS HELD NOVEMBER 14 DIFFERED GREATLY, DEPENDING ON DEGREE OF POPULAR CONCERN OR DISINTEREST IN MATTER. NOT SURPRISINGLY, GREATEST PARTICIPATION WAS REGISTERED IN CARINTHIA WHERE REPORTED TURNOUT AVERAGED 86 PERCENT. SCATTERED ETHNICALLY MIXED COMMUNITIES (CROATIAN, HUNGARIAN MINORITIES) IN BURGENLAND REPORTED SUBSTANTIAL PARTICIPATION OF ABOUT 75 PERCENT, ALTHOUGH OVERALL AVERAGE FOR PROVINCE AMOUNTED TO ONLY ABOUT 30 PERCENT. ELSEWHERE IN AUSTRIA, TURNOUT FOR LANGUAGE HEAD COUNT RANGED FROM 20-25 PERCENT IN EASTERN AUSTRIA TO LOW OF 5 PERCENT IN VORALBERG, AUSTRIA'S WESTERN-MOST PROVINCE.

3. AUSTRIAN MEDIA REPORTED SEVERAL INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE AT POLLING STATIONS IN SOUTHERN CARINTHIA, MOST SERIOUS OF WHICH WAS PUBLIC BURNING BY SEVERAL SLOVENE-SPEAKING YOUTHS OF CONTENTS OF BALLOT BOX IN ONE ETHNICALLY MIXED COMMUNITY. IN BURGENLAND, TWO BOMB THREATS TO POLLING STATIONS AND ONE THREAT OF ASSASSINATION WERE REPORTED.

4. SPOKESMEN OF VARIOUS MAJOR PARTIES TO CONTROVERSY HAVE EACH, IN OWN WAY, INTERPRETED OUTCOME AS FAVORABLE TO ITS CAUSE. CARINTHIAN GOVERNOR TERMED PARTICIPATION FIGURES FOR PROVINCE INDICATIVE OF DEMOCRATIC MATURITY OF CITIZENRY AND FAILURE OF EFFORTS SLOVENIAN MINORITY LEADERS TO MOUNT BOYCOTT OF LANGUAGE CENSUS. LATTER, IN TURN, STATE SLOVENE-SPEAKING ELEMENTS AND THEIR SYMPATHIZERS ELSEWHERE STAYED AWAY FROM POLLS IN LARGE NUMBERS, TURNING CENSUS INTO FIASCO AND THAT NEW APPROACH WILL NOW HAVE TO BE DEVELOPED, TAKING ALSO INTO CONSIDERATION WISHES OF SLOVENIAN MINORITY.

5. AS INDICATED REFTEL, ONLY AFTER COMPIRATION OF LANGUAGE CENSUS BALLOTS, RESULTS OF WHICH EXPECTED TO BECOME AVAILABLE IN EARLY 1977, WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE ACCURATE JUDGMENT ON UTILITY OF CENSUS COUNT. STATISTICS OF PARTICIPATION, HOWEVER, CONFIRM DISINTEREST

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OF OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AUSTRIANS IN SLOVENE MINORITY CONTROVERSY AND SUGGEST THAT RESULTS FOR CARINTHIA, WHEN AVAILABLE, WILL BE A MOST OF VERY LIMITED VALUE IN ESTABLISHING SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION OF SLOVENIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY. THIS LIKELIHOOD THEREFORE WILL PROBABLY MOVE GOA TO ATTEMPT TO ENGAGE SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERSHIP IN BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS TO DEVELOP NEW APPROACH TO ISSUE. BUCHANAN

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